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FORUM OF THE CENTER FOR POLICY ANALYSIS ON PALESTINE PARTICIPANTS: HASSAN ABDEL
RAHMAN, REPRESENTATIVE OF THE PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY; NABIL FAHMY, EGYPTIAN
AMBASSADOR TO THE U.S.; AND MARWAN MUASHER, JO



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AUTHORITY; NABIL FAHMY, EGYPTIAN AMBASSADOR TO THE U.S.; AND MARWAN
MUASHER, JORDANIAN AMBASSADOR TO THE U.S.

MODERATOR: SAMIH FARSOON

LOCATION: CENTER FOR POLICY ANALYSIS ON PALESTINE, WASHINGTON, D.C.

BODY:

MR. FARSOON: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to the Center for Policy Analysis on Palestine. My name is Samih Farsoun, and I am on the board of the Jerusalem Fund and the Center for Policy Analysis on Palestine.

It is my privilege this morning to introduce to you our distinguished speakers. We are very privileged to have them at this important juncture in the political and diplomatic history of the Middle East.

I'd like to introduce them in the order that they will speak I believe. And they are distinguished and have very long CVs, but I am not going to spend all the time. I'll take most of their time away from their talks if I read all of their CVs.

We have until 2:00 exactly today, and you have on your seats cards that we wish you would write questions for them. Each will speak in turn for about 10 to 12 minutes, and then we will have a chance for questions and answers from them after that.

It is my pleasure to introduce first Dr. Marwan Jamal Muasher, ambassador of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan to the United States and Mexico. Dr. Muasher presented his credentials as ambassador to Jordan on December 8th, 1997. Prior to his posting in Washington, Ambassador Muasher had served as minister of information. He was stationed in Israel as Jordan's envoy from 1995 to 1996. During the Middle East peace talks, from 1991 to 1994, Dr. Muasher directed the Jordan Information Bureau in the United States. Just prior to this position he was press advisor to the prime minister of Jordan. Ambassador Muasher attended the American University of Beirut from 1972 through '75. He received a B.S. in electrical engineering, an M.S. in computer engineering, and a Ph.D. in computer engineering from Purdue University.

Next we will have Mr. Nabil Fahmy. Mr. Fahmy is a career diplomat in the Egyptian Foreign Service. He has been ambassador of Egypt to the United States since 1999. Before that he was the ambassador of

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Egypt to Japan. And he has served in many, many capacities, including as first secretary of the Egyptian mission to the United Nations in New York. He is well published and has a number of publications on arms control and disarmament issues. He has studied at the American University of Cairo, both in management and physics and mathematics as well.

And the last one to be introduced -- it is my privilege to introduce Mr. Hassan Abdel Rahman. Mr. Abdel Rahman has been the head of the Palestine mission in the United States since 1994. He is both chief of mission for both the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian National Authority. From '92 to '93 Mr. Abdel Rahman served as chief of the Palestinian mission in Canada. Mr. Abdel Rahman serves also as senior political advisor to the Palestinian delegation to the Madrid peace conference, and to the peace talks in Washington, D.C. From 1988 to 1992, he was director of the Palestine Affairs Center in Washington. He has many other positions that he held. He obtained a master's degree in public administration from the University of Puerto Rico, as well as degree in political science from Catholic University of Puerto Rico. He speaks Arabic, English, Spanish and Portuguese. Maybe he will talk to us in Portuguese today. (Laughter.)

It is indeed my great pleasure to introduce these gentlemen to you, and to have them speak in the order I introduced them. Thank you. (Applause.) B. MUASHER: Thank you, Dr. Farsoun. I am going to limit my talk to the contents of the Jordanian-Egyptian initiative and just offer a few thoughts as my other colleagues will address other parts of the political development taking place now.

As you know, the Jordanian or the Egyptian-Jordanian initiative really came out as an attempt by the region to play an active role in stopping the crisis which we are facing right now in resuming the political process on the Palestinian-Israeli issue. This initiative does not offer any particular source as to the content of negotiations. These are left to the two sides to negotiate among themselves. But it does offer a road map that hopefully would take us out of the present crisis and resume the political process at an early date in the future.

The initiative -- and as you know although there were informal publications of its contents -- and yet we really chose not to dwell so much on every word in the initiative, as this is not the most important part of it. What is important is the content that it offers to the region and to the two sides. And if the concept is accepted we believe it offers a very reasonable way out of the present crisis.

It basically has three steps. The first are steps to end the present crisis, and these call for implementation of signed agreements, particularly of Sharm el Shiek and to the confrontation that exists today, and an end to also the military and the economic siege that Israel has today, and a return to Israel's position prior to December 2000 when the present intifada broke out. It also calls for convening or reconvening the Security Council meetings that took place before the second intifada broke out as well.

Then it is followed by a second step, which we also call confidence-building measures. These steps involve implementing all of the articles of the first Sharm el Shiek agreement signed December 5, 1999, including of course a third failed withdrawal by Israeli forces. And most importantly it also freezes all settlement activities.

And if you look at these two components, they mirror to a great extent that of the Mitchell report. The Mitchell report and the Egyptian-Jordanian initiative are really very close in the first two steps that they call for in order to take us out of the present crisis. But the Egyptian-Jordanian initiative goes one step further, and it is in our opinion a very important step, and one without which there is little hope of resuming or of getting out of the crisis, which is it offers a political component that will allow for a resumption of the negotiating process. We strongly believe that without offering such a political component that stopping at the Mitchell report is not by itself going to be able to get us out of where we are at today.

And therefore the initiative calls for a third phase, which is a resumption of the negotiating process that is one based on U.N. Resolution 242 and 348; and, two, it also calls for the need to preserve progress made in previous negotiations. That is why it does not explicitly call for abiding by all such negotiations. One cannot also ignore the fact that even though the progress made at Sabah did not end in signing an

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agreement; one cannot ignore the fact that indeed a lot of progress has been made that needs to be taken into account in any serious future negotiation.

This is the road map that is being offered by the initiative. It is simple, it is reasonable, it is based on signed agreements between the two sides. There is nothing new in this initiative except that it outlines in a sequence needed steps to be able to resume the process.

But one issue that has come up does of course we believe has emerged as the most important issue in this present crisis, is the issue of settlement activity. This is very important -- not just for Palestinians, but for Jordan, for all Arabs, the settlement activity stop in full. This is not, as Israel states, something that is being put on the same path with ending violence. It has nothing to do with ending violence. Settlement activity is illegal under international law -- has been condemned by all the countries or most of the countries of the world. The United States itself, while its position has weakened over settlement activity, still believes that settlement activity is an obstacle to peace. And unless we can agree on a freeze in such settlement activity there is little hope that you can give the Palestinians that there is light at the end of the tunnel. And really final status negotiations are not conducted in an atmosphere where facts on the ground are working to their disadvantage. Even the Oslo agreements, as you all know, state that unilateral action cannot be undertaken while final status negotiations are taking place. And settlement activities, as far as we are concerned, are indeed a unilateral action that should be stopped.

Israel keeps referring to the need to expand based on natural growth. There is no new settlements in Israel's terminology, but allowing for expanding the existing settlements to accommodate natural growth. Frankly our experience in the past has not been very positive with this Israeli position. That is known to all of you. Since the Oslo process started in 1993, there has been a 70 percent expansion in settlement activity in the last eight years, which goes of course well beyond any reasonable definition of natural growth.

This is what is on the table right now. This initiative has been accepted by Russia, by the European Union, by really many countries around the globe, and we are very encouraged by this. It is also supported by the United States. While the United States has not taken as strong a public position on the initiative as other countries have, yet we are working with the United States, and with all parties concerned in order to really, as I said, offer something for the future that goes beyond stopping the crisis that we are in now.

And I want to stop at this point and let my colleagues also talk about other aspects, and then listen to your questions and comments. Thank you. (Applause.)

AMB. FAHMY: I am going to build on what Ambassador Muasher said, and therefore simply give some off-the-cuff remarks without getting into once again the Jordanian-Egyptian proposal which he has explained I think quite clearly and quite eloquently.

In essence, we were asked to come here and talk about where we are today -- the U.S. role -- and where do we go from here. And let me in a bit of a philosophical trend try to comment on where we are today in terms of the Arab perspective on the one hand, but if I could add to that an Arab reading of the Israeli perspective as well.

Without getting into how it started, because that's a -- it's an issue which is -- could take most of the debate here, although frankly I think it was an issue that is clear-cut to any objective analyst. If I read the mood in the Arab world today, particularly in the Palestinian sector -- although I'll leave Hassan to comment more precisely on that -- it's different from what I hear abroad about it. I hear questions about the intentions of Palestinians, their commitment to peace, and that of the Arab world. And I'd like to say that my reading, Egypt's reading of the mood in the Arab world, is simply -- it's not -- it's of course not a good mood, but it is a mood which is best defined by saying that the center of the Arab world wants peace but has doubts about the possibility of peace in the present environment because of the developments which we've seen especially since the intifada and the measures that have come after that. And it's a mood which makes it very difficult to try to continue to find modalities to push the process forward. But at the same time it's a mood which I think was the driving force behind the Egyptian-Jordanian proposal. We did

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not make it out of a naive sense of idealism, but we made it out of a commitment to peace, even when the time is difficult -- even when the going is not what you'd want it to be.

If I can add, I think the mood in Israel -- and I say this talking about the Center -- and I was also talking about the Center in the Arab world -- I think it's -- again, it is not a mood which is against peace, but I think you have to change the face of it rather than want and doubt. I think it's more doubt and want. In other words, there are more people -- in my reading of the Israeli center -- who doubt the possibility of peace and are focusing on that part of the phrase than those who are focusing on the idea of wanting peace. And because of that you find more and more the -- if you want the more vocal peace camp not becoming vocal and retrenching back into the background, which I think is a difficult and regrettable posture, because it is time -- it is at times like this when we all have to take further action, when we all have to really strive and carry the burden when policies are being pursued, which are frankly inconsistent with peace.

I make these points as sort of a context for a long explanation of the proposal -- and I think it's important because it provides a context for everything that's happened since then, and in many respects for how I can at least speak on the Arab side -- how the Arab side will act in the future.

Our commitment to peace is still unwavering. Our confidence in achievement is what's wavering. But we will continue to work towards that objective, and we hope we will find a partner -- not to pursue and develop a different peace, but to pursue and develop the historic compromise which was achieved all the way back in Resolution 242 and then developed after that with the compendium of different resolutions and processes and agreements which we developed on other tracks -- Palestinian, of course Jordanian, Lebanese and Syrian as well.

Let me comment for just a few seconds on the U.S. role. And it's really an interesting question, because on the one hand we are all asking for a larger U.S. role, and on the other hand, if you put yourself in the shoes of an American politician, he looks at it from the American perspective. And therefore as is obvious up to now, are engaged but more costly engaged than the call you've heard from the region.

This is a new administration, and it's normal and quite expected for them to be cautious. That is an element which we don't challenge, which we don't disagree with. On the other hand, from our perspective, from the Middle East, it is an extremely urgent, volatile situation which will move from bad to worse. And therefore we argue for an enhanced engagement by the U.S. -- not only from the perspective of our own interests as countries looking for a peace process trying to move this process forward, but also from the perspective of -- that the situation will get worse and therefore it will be more difficult even for the U.S. in the future if you have a more volatile situation and if you have less optimism, less possibility for peace.

But what is the role that we are all looking for? And I will be a bit candid. And I don't want to use this traditional phrase of honest broker. I am really looking at the role as the main sponsor of the Middle East peace process. That's the commitment that the U.S. took upon itself. The U.S. took upon itself the commitment that the basis for the resolution of this problem will be the Madrid framework, which is based on 242 and international law. That is the commitment. That is what we are asking the U.S. to continue to pursue. And the U.S. has been, whether the tactics were right or wrong, the U.S. has been part and parcel of almost all of the agreements that have been reached over the last eight, nine years. Therefore it is a U.S. responsibility to build -- to preserve first of all on the commitments that were taken all the way back at Madrid; secondly, to preserve what we built over the last eight, nine years.

And then you have a commitment -- you have a responsibility as the main sponsor within the Madrid peace process to pursue agreements on the Palestinian-Israeli track and consequently or in parallel to that with Lebanon and Israel as well. So it is not -- and I want to underline this -- it's not that you have to respond the way Arabs want you to respond. It is you have the responsibility to respond on the basis of your own commitments and defending your own interests in the region. And therefore it is imperative not to allow the parties in the region to cross red lines and boundaries where they violate the essence and the

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foundation of the principals governing the peace process -- acquisition of territory by force, violating the basic parameters of 242 and the agreements reached are just simple examples of that.

The third point I'd really like to make -- and then maybe then give the floor to Ambassador Rahman to comment on the Palestinian perspective -- is where do we go from here? Or my perception of what will happen. I don't know what's going to happen -- except for one thing -- we will not stay where we are. That's not going to happen. We either will fly backwards or slowly try to be able to manage the situation as it is today, and ultimately down the road infuse new optimism, new hope in the peace process and be able to build on that.

The choice is -- well, it's not a -- well, it is a moral choice on the one hand. But, beyond that, you cannot prevent yourself from moving backwards, unless you address the concerns of all the parties. And if I can't say we are not appearing to be promoting our own proposal too much, I think that is the essence of the Jordanian- Egyptian proposal. It deals with the concepts and elements that have been raised by all the parties, Arabs and Israelis. It is not a proposal which is simply defining processes of one side rather than the other. It has -- it emphasizes fundamentals, it has -- it fails -- and at the same time it has a clear time line and road map for where we are going. In other words, we are not redefining the wheel here, we are not developing a new peace process; we are building on what we have achieved.

In the absence of that things ultimately will get much worse. When in the past we were looking at -- I don't want to appear to be cynical here, but when we were looking at state-to-state conflict it was bad enough. When you are looking at the situation where individuals are killed every day on simple errands from one place to the other, you are really looking at a conflict which is much deeper and much more dangerous. It is imperative, despite of the deep sense of pessimism, which frankly I can't say that I don't share at least partially -- it is imperative to once again in this particular difficult time to prevent ourselves from moving backwards by being engaged, by being active, by having a larger U.S. role, by activating the peace movements wherever they may be, financing these policies, which is consistent with enunciating and practicing a policy which is consistent with the Madrid fundamentals, and the agreements reached so far between the parties.

I just want to make one point which is particularly frustrating in the negotiating process. The whole debate about whether we can -- whether agreements were binding for the parties or not if they have not been signed, with understandings by the parties, where we move from where we are today -- if you look at the Mitchell report, it talks about agreements and understandings. If you look at the Mitchell report, it talks about the positions of all the parties, particularly the Palestinians -- in this case the Palestinians and the Israelis. If you look at the Egyptian-Jordanian proposal, again it has all the elements there -- nobody is de-emphasizing the importance of one rather than the other. Nobody is getting into the debate about what -- at least the proponents of the report and the proposals -- on what has to be done first. There is both a principled legal position presented there and pragmatic realism into what can be done provided that they are taken as a package rather than simply picking and choosing one point in the proposal or the other. And that I think is the concept with which we have to pursue the peace process in the future. If we decide to pick and choose out of the Mitchell report or the Jordanian-Egyptian proposal, neither will get anywhere. If we take them as a package and see how we can pursue the elements in response to the position of the other side, then you may have a chance to stop the situation where it is today, to slowly try to build confidence, and to move quickly -- to move into the negotiating process.

I put them in that way, and I want to emphasize the three elements of dealing with the situation today -- building confidence and moving the negotiation on final settlement cannot be separate. I don't believe that if you separate them any of them are achieved. I don't believe that you can address the current crisis. And you will notice in the Jordan-Egypt proposal that is how the first phase is described. It is not described as violence or the lack of violence; it is dealing with the present crisis.

The next phase, which talks about confidence building again -- talks about issues in which deal with the positions of both sides. And final settlement. It's needless to say it would be tremendously difficult to come to closure on final settlement in this environment. But I think by deciding not to deal with issues of final settlement, by politically taking the decision to postpone them, we ultimately may be doing much

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more damage to the first two phases of the proposals where they are confidence-building or dealing with the present crisis.

I've already gone on longer than I've wanted, and I wanted to give Hassan his time to speak. But I am happy to take questions after that. Thank you. (Applause.)

MR. RAHMAN: Well, let me at the outset thank the Center for Policy Analysis and also Samih Farsoun and Heidi for inviting us here today, and all of you for coming.

I will focus in my short presentation on the Mitchell report -- for two reasons. One because it really corrects many of the distortions and misperceptions that were perpetrated by the government of Israel and the supporters of Israel here in the United States about the origins of the intifada and what has happened since then. And, second, because the Mitchell report now is the foundation on which the latest diplomatic efforts to get us out of the situation are being focused.

So on the issue of the substance of the report, we, the Palestine Liberation Organization and Palestinian National Authority, consider the report to be a balanced statement, and we endorse its foundations, and we believe that its implementation will complement the Jordanian- Egyptian peace initiative.

We consider it balanced because it really deals with the positions of both parties; this is not one-sided. Although when we spoke to Senator Mitchell, I personally, after he issued the report, he said he was not writing -- his intention was not to write a history book. His intention was to write a political statement or political report to serve as the basis for efforts to get us out of the situation we are in.

So but nevertheless the report made very interesting findings. Among them is that the responsibility for the intifada lies on Israel, first for the Al Axa (ph) Mosque visit of Mr. Sharon on September 28 to el Harisharif (ph) and second to the level of violence used by the Israeli army in the first four days of the intifada where over 49 Palestinians were killed before any Israeli was wounded. So it was really the violence by the Israeli army that created the situation among the Palestinians which led to the situation we are in today, and to the level of protect and resistance that the Palestinians are conducting to the Israeli military occupation.

So the first four days of the intifada, which were civil disobedience by the Palestinians -- 49 Palestinians were killed, no Israelis were wounded. And those who were involved in the killing of the Palestinians was the Israeli army and the Israeli security forces. Therefore the report clearly indicates the responsibility clearly lies on the Israelis.

The second finding of the report is that there is no evidence that supports the allegation of the Israeli government and the supporters of Israel that this intifada was pre-planned by the Palestinian Authority as a response to Israeli offers -- so-called generous offers at Camp David, from which the Palestinians walked away. On the contrary, the report says clearly that all their investigations during the four months did not reach that conclusion.

The third finding is that the settlement activity in the Palestinian territories are the most serious -- (inaudible) -- act by the Israeli government. It undermines the confidence of the Palestinians in the process, and it undermines the whole possibility of moving forward with the peace process.

So here you have the finding of the commission that corrects many of the distortions that are prevalent here in Washington today, and even perpetuated after the report was issued. The same people and the same institutions and the same officials -- some of them in the government -- continue to perpetrate those distortions and those misinformation -- let me put it this way, in order not to say lies -- about the origins and about how the situation evolved.

But let me tell you something else. We believe that the original intent is the occupation -- occupation, military occupation by Israel of the Palestinian territories of the Palestinian people -- the longest military occupation in recent history is responsible for the situation in the Palestinian territory. And therefore for anyone to speak about violence in the Palestinian territories without referring to Israel's occupation and

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the atrocities committed by the Israeli army throughout the last 33 years -- 34 years in fact in a month -- or in less than a month, in a week -- Israel will of course complete its 34th year of military occupation of the Palestinian territories. Israel is responsible for what we are witnesses today.

I assume that in any situation anywhere in the world any normal people would not tolerate that their country, that their people would be denied their very basic human and political rights for self-determination and remain quiet. We are the only people who are apt to remain quiet under foreign military occupation. I assume if Washington God forbid came under foreign military occupation, I would assume that people here in Washington would ask the people of Washington at least to protest -- say not to occupation. In the case of the Palestinians, if we say no we are at -- we are told that this is violence. So you have somebody coming to your house with tanks and armies -- violating every single right of the Palestinian people. And yet we are asked to not even protest.

And I am focusing on this point because we are told today that cessation of violence is the condition sine qua non for in the future for tackling the political issue. And so there is unfortunately in the process an attempt to focus on the issue of protests by the Palestinians while ignoring the overwhelming crimes by the way that are committed by the Israeli government and not considering them as violence.

For example, the use of excessive force by Israel, which was condemned by every single international organization -- the use of bulldozers to uproot 23,000 olive trees in the Palestinian territory is not considered as an act of violence, and we do not see an outrage here in Washington by neither the citizens of a democratic government for those atrocities. The director of the International Red Cross in Israel described those acts by Israel to mild war crimes because Israel under the (fourth ?) Geneva Convention is responsible for providing protection for people under occupation. Yet Israel, instead of providing protection, it uses American-made helicopters, tanks, weapons to destroy Palestinian civilian quarters. If Israel is the other occupying power other than Serbia. Sharon is the only other leader in the world other than Milosevic who uses F-16 airplanes to bombard a prisoner -- according to him -- in the city of Nazareth, and destroy other Palestinian installations.

So when we talk about violence we are the first to ask for the cessation of violence. But we have to define what is violence. What constitutes violence? Is it people who are trying to protect themselves in their own homes? Everyone knows that Palestinians are not in Tel Aviv. Why we condemn and oppose any act of violence against Israeli cities or Palestinian cities. But remember that Israel has more armed forces today in the West Bank and Gaza than what it used to occupy the West Bank and Gaza in 1967. It uses much more power and force than what it used in 1967. No other country in the world does what the Israelis do to the Palestinians with impunity. That's why we feel that you cannot talk about the issue of cessation of violence without taking those facts into consideration.

We were the first to say yes to the Mitchell report and to the Egyptian-Jordanian peace initiative. Why we said that? Because we really want out of this situation we are in. We are the one who is losing the most as a result of the prevailing situation, because we are the people who are under occupation. We are the people who lost 600 Palestinian lives -- 35 percent of them are children under the age of 17. We are the ones who lost over 800 homes destroyed. So we are the ones -- people -- who have an interest in getting out of the situation. And that's why we say yes to the cessation of violence -- but it is the real violence that is directed against the people.

And that takes me to the second step, and that is an effort -- any effort to get us out of this situation and put us back on track, on the track of the peace process to require first of all that the Israeli army ceases all the measures that they have imposed on the Palestinian territories, which include closure, which includes placing Israeli tanks and armored vehicles in the heart of Palestinian population centers, ending the siege imposed on the Palestinian territories, on Gaza and the West Bank, opening the borders with Jordan and Egypt, allowing the Palestinian people to move freely from one city to the other, to end all the collective punishment measures that are imposed on the Palestinian territories. And I assure you that we and the Palestinian people will -- (inaudible) --

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But to say that the responsibility for violence is on the Palestinians is absolutely going to lead to nowhere. Today for example -- today Mr. Sharansky, the minister of housing of Israel, declared that Israel will build 710 new houses in the settlement. This flies in the face of Mr. Burns and the effort that he is conducting, because remember that we are opposed to settlements not only horizontally but vertically also. We are opposed not to the construction of buildings; we are also opposed to the presence of settlers in our land, because that is a violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention and of international law.

So no serious effort by anybody will lead us out of this situation unless we have a real commitment that the settlement activity which undermines the territorial basis for the Palestinian state -- if we did not have Jewish settlements in Gaza, we would not have a confrontation with Gaza. If we did not have Jewish settlements in Nablus. There would be no Israeli Army in Nablus to start with to protect those citizens.

So I believe that the most dangerous element in this Palestinian- Israeli confrontation is the settlements. And if the settlements are moved, tomorrow a separation between Palestine and Israel would be possible. But in Camp David and after Camp David the main issue is Jewish settlements, whether it is in Jerusalem or in the West Bank and Gaza, because it is impossible to be able to deal with the issue of security in the presence of settlements. It is difficult to deal with the issue of territory also with the presence of those settlements.

So, while we -- and I know I have taken more time than what was allocated to me, but I think Marwan and Nabil gave me each five minutes from their time. (Laughter.)

So, anyway -- so, we feel that there is an opportunity. This opportunity is serious. It enjoys the support of the international community -- Europe, Russia, the United Nations, even the United States -- support the Mitchell report and the Jordanian-Egyptian peace initiative. But we do not want any mistake about where we stand on those issues. We believe in the implementation of the recommendations simultaneously -- especially the issue of cessation of violence and a cessation of Jewish settlements in the Palestinian territories. Those should be linked within a timetable to the implementation of the other two major elements. One is the restoration of the situation that existed on September 28th, and negotiations on both how to implement -- or mechanisms to implement what has been signed between the two parties and the negotiations on final status. We cannot accept under any circumstances a perpetuation of the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territory. There has to be a timetable set for concluding the permanent status negotiations, and there has to be also a timetable for implementation of the agreement that was signed in Sharm el Sheik and Wye River, and we are ready to implement our side of those agreements, provided that Israel implements theirs.

I believe that the only way for us to get out of the situation we are in -- because this must be a security issue -- this is a political issue. Again, the original sin is the occupation. Occupation is not normal, and therefore occupation provokes resistance, provokes protest, and no one can expect the Palestinians to remain silent when their freedom and their land is being raped and confiscated. And I thank you very much. (Applause.)

MR. FARSON: Thank you, gentlemen. Let me ask the questions that I received in order. Let me tell you first that there are two kinds of questions, some very specific and some general. I tried to group them in such a way that each ambassador could answer, but also some of them that I will read now are general for everyone, so I wish you would take note of that.

First, with respect to Ambassador Muasher, the question reads: "With its adoption of the Mitchell report, the U.S. seems to have neglected the Egyptian-Jordanian initiative to a secondary role." "Relegated," sorry -- "the Egyptian-Jordanian initiative to a secondary role." How can the provisions of both the Mitchell report and the Egyptian-Jordanian initiative be wed together? I think this would also apply to Ambassador Fahmy.

Specifically -- let me read off all of them, if you don't mind. This is for all three speakers: "Do you see any use for a future role after the publication of the Mitchell fact-finding commission for Senator Mitchell and the fact-finding mission itself?"

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This question again is a general one: "Usually when diplomats agree to speak out they talk about history rather than current issues. Should we assume therefore that the Jordanian-Egyptian initiative has become history? Is it dead? And, if not, then how does it relate to the Mitchell report?"

To Ambassadors Muasher and Fahmy: "Please comment on the call of the Egyptian-Jordanian proposal for an international monitoring force."

And, finally: "How are you expecting to resolve any differences in the viewpoint among many Arab factions in regard to the peace process?" B. MUASHER: I'll take the first part. I don't think that the Jordanian-Egyptian initiative is dead or even secondary. It is very understandable that the United States and others have chosen to -- wisely so -- to focus their attention in the short term on the Mitchell report, which after all has been prepared by a commission led by a very respected American ex-majority leader, saying, among other things, that settlement activity has to stop, and offering a very balanced report that does not attempt to blame or assign blame on one party or the other, but rather to deal with the situation on the ground. And I think it is extremely wise of the United States to focus now on the Mitchell report.

However, the Mitchell report, according to its own mandate, deals with the short term. It does not deal with the political part of the problem, and it does not offer a long-term solution. And what we propose is that even to arrive at the short term without a long-term framework agreed to a priori will not be possible. Who among the Palestinians is going to be able to go to their people and say, We ask you to continue your frustration in return for at best a long-term interim arrangement offered to you by Israel while settlement activity continues? Who among the Palestinians can do this, unless you offer the Palestinians a political component that provides hope that there is light at the end of the tunnel, that they are not going to even negotiate or engage in open-ended final status negotiations that might go on for another 10 years while another 70 percent settlement expansion takes place. You have little hope of advancing because of the peace process. And therefore I think that the two initiatives have to be worked together -- are worked together. The Mitchell report deals with the short term -- the Egyptian-Jordanian initiative with the long term -- but in a framework where both the short term and the long term have to be agreed to, at least as far as the steps that have to be taken to take us from where we are to where we want to be.

International monitoring force? You know, I don't want to again go into the details of the initiative, but I would suggest that the initiative does not directly deal with this issue at all. And what were the other questions? Future role for Senator Mitchell -- I would not really focus the attention on the persons as much as on the issues. I believe that the United States has taken a very good move in that it has brought back the peace process to the Bureau of the Near East. I think by doing so it is going to make use of the expertise of its own embassies and of its own people in the region, and that is an extremely positive development. We in Jordan know Ambassador Burns very well. He is an extremely balanced person, and we believe also his appointment as special envoy to the Middle East process is a positive one. But we also need to take it beyond the persons, beyond the personalities, to deal with the issues at hand.

MR. FARSON: There are a couple of questions specifically to Ambassador Fahmy, but he also has these general questions that I've already asked before. Let me specifically read the one for him by name: "Ambassador Fahmy, should the parties accept and implement phase one and phase two of the Mitchell report? What will be the Arab expectations of phase three -- that is to say negotiations? What is there to negotiate -- who is there to negotiate with? Sharon, who does not believe in permanent status agreement with the Palestinians?" It's a rhetorical question for you.

There is one general question that I hadn't read before that I am going to read now, so I hope you will also address it: Why aren't we telling the Americans like it is? Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah has turned down President Bush's invitation. Some Gulf states have suspended, if not canceled, arms purchases from the U.S. The state of Qatar finally has closed the trade office, Israel's trade office, as others have done. The question then is, What is it going to take to have the U.S. take a more positive role in regard to the conflict?

FORUM OF THE CENTER FOR POLICY ANALYSIS ON PALESTINE PARTICIPANTS: HASSAN ABDEL RAHMAN, REPRESENTATIVE OF THE PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY; NABIL FAHMY, EGYPTIAN AMBASSADOR TO THE U.S.; AND MARWAN MUASHER, JO

AMB. FAHMY: Thank you. I think Ambassador Muasher answered the general questions quite adequately. Therefore I won't really comment on them at any length. Let me just make one point which relates both to the idea of having Senator Mitchell once again playing a role, and also to the issue of the U.S. role in the future. What's important here are not modalities. That's obvious. In other words, what is the mandate? What are the positions that whoever is going to pursue the file is given to pursue? That I think is the fundamental issue here, and I am comfortable with whatever format the U.S. decides to choose in terms of how it or who it nominates to pursue its Middle East policy. The point that is a focus to me are what exactly are the marching orders he will be given in terms of how to pursue them. And therefore I agree with Marwan -- it's not personalities as much as it is substance. And I welcome Ambassador Burns in his new assignment.

Quickly, on the Jordanian-Egyptian proposal, I know people tend to have short memories and are particularly impatient in this time and age, and with this issue -- particularly they are justifiably so. But the proposal has just been put out there, and I really believe that given the way it's been put out it does provide a time line and a road map upon which to build, which encompasses the Mitchell report and goes beyond that.

So I do believe it has its own -- I do believe it has a lifetime of its own, although it has to be embraced pretty soon. And if you take into account for example when Resolution 242 was adopted and embraced and implemented, you understand what I mean. If you don't embrace it collectively, then its own lifetime tends to shorten. But I think we are far from there, from that point just now.

Arab expectations and who are their negotiators? I said at the beginning I am not overly optimistic; I am just committed to pursuing peace. And I read the facts, the realities, like everybody else does, and I have my own questions about this. But, nevertheless, our expectations should not be less and should not be more than what our rights are. We should continue to pursue them irrespective of who is there and who isn't there. If we can achieve a solution consistent with those rights, including a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, and the West Bank including East Jerusalem -- if we can achieve those rights with the present Israeli government, fine. If we cannot, we should continue to pursue them with whoever is in government in Israel.

The issue of why aren't we telling the U.S. or why aren't we talking to them as it is -- I'm not exactly sure what the question was -- we are. In actual fact we are. We are talking very honestly, very candidly, and I think also very constructively to the U.S. If you want a U.S. engagement, then you have to assume that that is the address where your arguments are addressed. And we, in a very candid, frank and forthcoming manner, do explain positions to the U.S. government, and we believe that there have been some positive changes, or at least the expedition of the process of engagement in different forms. We would hope that in the future we will see more of that.

But in closing on this question, I do share a little bit the sense of frustration and pessimism which is undermined in the question, because it I think also emphasizes the very difficult situation which we face in the region and the importance of moving forward rather quickly. Thank you.

MR. FARSON: The next set of questions are for Mr. Abdel Rahman. Specifically they are: How do you think or what do you think of the prospects of the peace process going on between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, when Mr. Sharon leads the Israeli government?

MR. RAHMAN: Leaves or leads? (Laughter.)

MR. FARSON: Leads. The next question is: Please assess the likelihood of ethnic cleansing or population transfer; that is, the Palestinians being forced out of the West Bank and Gaza under the current circumstances. If this were to happen, what would the Arab countries do?

Let's see, these are very general ones, and I think I will leave you to try to answer these, if you don't mind. And I don't know if we have any more time, but the last question I just received, if I may just quickly mention it is: What is Egypt's and Jordan's position on the issue of refugees? Is that the question? Refugees. Okay, Mr. Abdel Rahman.

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MR. RAHMAN: Well, let me speak first about the -- for one minute -- about the relationship between the Mitchell report and the Jordanian-Egyptian initiative and how we view both the link between the two. We view them as complementary to each other. And we believe that for any diplomatic effort to succeed it has really to present us with a package, the package that includes all the issues linked to each other with a timetable. Otherwise I don't believe there is any chance for success. To try to deal with the issues in a piecemeal manner, disconnecting one from the other -- let's focus now on this issue -- and then after we will look at the others -- is a nonstarter as far as we are concerned. There has to be a linkage, and this linkage should show us the whole map -- the beginning and the end of the road.

Now, whether this brings me to answer the question on Sharon. If this package is there when they implement 20, 30, 40 percent under Sharon, I don't know whether the process will be for Sharon or the process will get rid of Sharon. I mean, you know in the past I believe that the Wye River agreements were instrumental in getting Mr. Netanyahu out of it, because he signed an agreement that he did not implement. I believe that the Madrid peace process led to the defeat of Likud in the elections in 1992. So either you have someone who -- in Israel -- who will respond to the 62 percent of the Israeli public who is calling for cessation of old Jewish settlements, or somebody who will oppose and then have to pay the price. But I believe that if we are serious about moving forward, we have really to deal -- to present this as a package, that -- and again, as I said, because no Palestinian leader will accept or can accept to have an open-ended negotiations, because open-ended negotiations means perpetuation of occupation, and no Palestinian leader can have or can accept that.

The second, the ethnic cleansing, I must tell you it happened once in our history. It happened in 1948. And we are -- I mean, not only us, but everybody is paying the price. And I am telling you it is not going to happen again, whoever asked the question, because this time the Palestinians would rather die in their country, but they are not going to leave. And I am telling you this seriously, and you have to look at the situation today, where you have little kids facing tanks, Israeli tanks -- this means that this people is going to be free, and they are not going to be allowed to be transported, neither in buses or trucks across the border. They will not do it. And so I believe that this is obvious to everyone who is looking at the recent history of the Palestinians. We rather fight and die in our own country than languish in refugee camps in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan or wherever they are going to go.

But I would hope the international community will not allow the ethnic cleansing. And I hope that the international community, and particularly the United States, will lead an effort, like it did in Kosovo, and not allow this to happen.

We are hopeful, again, that we will not come to that point, for the very simple reason, because we believe that the overwhelming majority of the Israeli public, as well as the overwhelming majority of the Palestinian public, are in support of peace.

Q Are you disappointed that Arafat has not been invited to -- (off mike)?

MR. RAHMAN: Sorry?

Q Are you disappointed that Arafat has not been invited?

MR. RAHMAN: Well, I mean, I think let me answer it by saying the following: I believe that I am -- am I disappointed for Arafat not being invited to the United States? I believe that Yasser Arafat is a principal partner to peace or war in the Middle East, and for the United States to play a credible role it has to deal with all the principal parties, like it deals with Sharon, King Abdullah, President Mubarak. It has to deal with Arafat. Otherwise its effort will not be credible. Thank you. (Applause.)

MR. FARSON: We are just a little over the two o'clock mark, so please thank the speakers and join me in applauding them for a very interesting presentation. (Applause.) Thank you.

END

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